SCHOOL REFORM AND THE TRAGIC SENSE OF POSSIBILITY

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I write to document a disturbing claim: there has been little fundamental reform in the public schools since 1960; 80 percent of the reforms advanced since 1960 reflect values that are anti-intellectual and undemocratic. I share this assertion with intellectual confidence and deep regret. I write also to put forth a vexing proposition that follows from this no-reform condition: the public schools are dying. I share this proposition with hesitancy and sadness. My sadness is tinged with guilt at even the prospect of abandoning a life-long loyalty to the schools of the people.

But within these feelings floats a rope of logic that ties the assertion of no reform to the proposition that public education is dying. If it is true that the public schools have not reformed themselves in fundamental ways in at least three decades, and if it is also true that the most notable distinction between a living thing and a dead thing is the capacity of the living thing to renew itself,[1] the public schools must be either dead or dying.

I desperately look for deeds in school reform and see virtually none although the flush of words by academics and politicians flow with the certainty if not the majesty of a great river. It is of more than casual interest that teachers and principals, day laborers in reform, speak very little. The words of Lech Walesa to the U.S. Congress about another matter are worth recalling. The Polish reformer said, "We have heard many beautiful words of encouragement. These are appreciated. But, being a worker and a man of concrete work, I must tell you that the supply of words on the world market is plentiful, but the demand is falling. Let deeds follow words now."[2] My assertions in this article have been deeply influenced by the participant knowledge and feelings I have gained since 1984 working with teachers and principals in that unmapped territory we call school reform.

What is fundamental reform? Fundamental reform is reform that is intellectual and democratic as these terms might reasonably be understood from John Dewey's philosophy. These terms point to Educational North on my compass. If we place Dewey's theory in time by drawing on social and intellectual histories of the progressive movement such as those written by Lawrence Cremin, Willam Reese, David Tyack and others, we can sketch some of the major features of this relatively unknown reform territory. And we must link these ideas to practical <u>actions</u> in the world of schools and reform else we be left with ideas whose consequences to children and teachers would be unknown. My perspective on reform is Deweyan-progressive.[3] With Lech Walesa I believe the demand for words untied to concrete action is falling.

If there is any doubt that the toy soldiers of reform stiffly march in ordered ranks across the decades, painted illusions created by the minds in some of our finest universities and prestigious foundations, review with me a bit of what I have found to be true of reform since 1960. My discussion of reform and related matters draws on a forthcoming book that views reform from a Deweyan - progressive perspective.[4]

Figure 1 presents a panoramic view of representative reforms across three decades. Let your eye scan the decades. Recall times gone by: the excitement of the new mathematics and science programs, Jerome Bruner and the "structure of the disciplines" approach to our presumed lag in science and rocketry compared with the Soviet Union. Or take something that warmed the hearts of the social engineers in the U.S. Office of Education, the 1970's effort to contract with corporations to raise test scores. Richard L. Bright brought systems analysis to the USOE in 1966 from Westinghouse and Leon Lessinger wrote in 1970 that "a private contractor will have greater freedom to innovate and thus be more successful in motivating students" than regular schools have been. The teaching-to-the-test scandal in Texarkana, Texas, and the massive failure of private corporations to raise the achievement level of children from poor families in a field experiment run by the Office of Economic Opportunity in 1972 cooled the ardor of the systems engineers. The behaviorist's bag of tricks, motivational incentives, programmed

instruction, task analysis, and reinforcement, did not work any better in the OEO experiment than practices in the public schools which the private contractors were sure they could best.[5]

Figure 1: Representative Reforms and Events: 1950-1990

1950s

Life Adjustment Education, U.S. Office of Education, early fifties
Why Johnny Can't Read by Rudolf Flesch, 1955
Sputnik orbits, 1957
Publication of James B. Conant's The American High School Today (1959)

1960s

New mathematics and science curriculums
Electronic foreign language laboratories
The Trump high school
Ungraded schools
Open classrooms
Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI), programmed texts in reading, math
Educational television
Team teaching
Community control of schools, New York City
Compensatory programs in reading and arithmetic (Chapter 1, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965)

1970s

Behavioral objectives
Chicago mastery learning
Career education
Sensitivity training
Contracting to corporations to raise test scores in basic skills
Accountability and testing surface
Linear model of R and D
Competency-based curricula, testing
Individually Guided Education (University of Wisconsin)

1980s

State testing programs in full swing in 35 or more states
Leadership in education
Computers
Effective school research
Effective teaching research
Plethora of reform reports and legislative regulation
Thinking skills
The Hunter teaching approach
Curriculum alignment
Mainstreaming of special education students
The Paideia Proposal
Concern about the professional status of teachers
Coaching
Assertive Discipline
Coalition of Essential Schools

What reforms since 1960 might meet the Deweyan-progressive criterion of worth? I found only six reforms that met the intellectual and democratic criterion (Figure 2). Almost all of the other 28 reforms reflect a view of learning and teaching based on a scientific-technical rationality. Some of the reforms do fall into gray areas, but this does not change the technological pattern in the reforms advanced over thirty years.[6]

Figure 2. Reforms that Met the Intellectual and Democratic Criterion of Worth

The Trump high school
Open Classrooms
Nongraded Schools
Team Teaching
The Paideia Proposal
The Coalition of Essential Schools

The new mathematics and science programs, darlings of reform in the 1960s, met the intellectual but not the democratic element of the criterion based on a careful description and analysis of several of these curriculums. These curriculums, particularly those in science, did not address the humanistic and social import of their disciplines. Dewey opposed scientific knowledge used only for technical ends. He warned "that technical progress alone does not modify the quality of human purposes." Science, he believed, should transform social ends. Science is a humanistic study.[7] Only the more socially privileged students in the suburbs studied these curriculums. Rural and urban schools did not extensively participate in this reform.[8]

The superficial (and much praised) report on teaching as a profession, A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation, failed to meet Deweyan criteria. This report is based on a technical rationality that would please Frederick Taylor. Although A Nation Prepared makes isolated recommendations that are laudable, such as giving teachers more decision-making power in schools, these pieces are undercut by the impoverishment of the primary means invoked to reach the report's goals: the assessment of teacher competency by an ideologically centralized national standards board. This policy belies a faith in the power of objective measurement that is historically unfounded.[9]

As one final rough cut at the complexities of reform within the space limitations here, consider the large number of reforms tentatively grouped as technological in Figure 3. All of these so called reforms except those in Family B and contracting with companies to raise test scores are alive and well in our schools. One of the most damaging reforms, the federally-funded remedial programs for children from economically poor families, Chapter 1 programs which began in 1965 under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as part of Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty, reaches into 14,000 school districts in the U.S (about 90 percent) in a drill-for-skill-pull-out program that has not even shown gains on the limited measure given by standardized tests. Well over 5O billion dollars have been spent on this crude effort since 1965 and I estimate that 20 million children have learned what it most often taught, most probably an aversion to books and reading that will last a lifetime. No reform packs the power of money and reach than Chapter 1 remedial programs. [10] Another reform with a long arm is Assertive Discipline which has reached 500,000 teachers according to Lee Canter. Madeline Hunter has probably influenced as many. This whole issue cries out for more discussion. I shall put it this way: if the good reforms such as John Goodlad's nongraded schools, open classrooms as Vito Perrone or Lillian Weber might see them, the Coalition of Essential Schools and Re:Learning with their 500 schools, if all of these reforms with Foxfire and whole language thrown in, plough 100 acres on the educational farm, others less insightful and less feeling are turning over 900 acres with the heavy machinery of state testing mandates, desultory teacher talk and textbooks, the forty-seven minute period, and the long chains of stimulus-response bonds (themselves the residue of factual learning) which float in the air like paper-mache streamers untethered to either thought or feeling, left there amidst the debris of what was to have been a celebration. I believe it is time for progressive educators in the universities to recognize that we have lost the battle for intellectual and democratic education in even 20 percent of our public schools. We may see far in one direction atop the ivory perch as we survey the scene with scholarly detachment, but we do not see clearly nor will our eye accept the panoramic view.

Figure 3. Nineteen Technological Reforms Tentatively Regrouped Into Families

Family A: Reforms That Focus on Content Pieces or Isolated Skills for Greater Efficiency

Chapter 1 (Title 1), ESEA, remedial reading programs for children in economically poor families
Chicago mastery learning reading program
The Hunter teaching approach and effective teaching research *
Individually Guided Education
Individually Prescribed Instruction in reading and arithmetic
Thinking as a set of skills Competency-based curricula and testing
Behavioral objectives

Family B: Reforms Whose Attracting Feature Is a Machine

Electronic language laboratories
Educational television
Computers [IBM's Writing to Read]

Family C: Reforms That Focus on the Organizational-Management Dimension

Local accountability and testing programs
State testing programs
Aligning the curriculum to the test (curriculum alignment)
A linear research development-diffusion model
Effective schools research
Assertive discipline
Contracting to corporations to raise test scores

*Treated as one reform because of their common epistemological roots, but counted as two reforms.

One complex reform from thirty years ago must be mentioned because the different ways teachers and principals interpreted its substance reveals a critically important and neglected factor in reform: the ideas and values teachers and principals hold about learning and teaching directly influences the on-the-ground quality of a reform. This reform is Individually Guided Education developed by the University of Wisconsin in the mid-sixties. IGE was an effort to personalize learning. Two conflicting ideas about learning and teaching lay at its core, one I call progressive in the Piagetian tradition, the other mechanical in the tradition of Skinnerian behaviorism. This theoretical contradiction had the effect of an educational Rorschach test when thousands of teachers adopted this seemingly straightforward way of teaching. In schools where the teachers held traditional beliefs, IGE became a very restrictive, mechanical way of teaching, the Skinnerian strand became the whole; in schools where teachers and principals held more progressive beliefs, on the other hand, IGE became a more intellectual and democratic way of learning worthy of a good school with a similar philosophy. Most books on reform and most certainly practice in education, ignore the power of ideas to influence the way we conduct our schools.

The power of ideas held by teachers and principals to influence the quality of a reform and to influence the reform process itself is one of the major conclusions of my study. Although I draw on the excellent field study by Thomas Popkewitz and his colleagues at the University of Wisconsin to describe how IGE was nurtured in real schools, my "idea hypothesis" better explains some of their findings. This analysis also shows that teachers and principals in middle-and upperclass communities, as well as those in working-class communities, often shared mechanical and miseducative ideas about learning and teaching, a point Popkewitz does not make. This finding suggests that poor schools, ie. schools that fail to cultivate the students' and teachers' intelligence and which are undemocratic, are not necessarily confined within

the lines of social class. If one uses a Deweyan-progressive criterion of educational worth, almost all of our children are receiving an education that is intellectually and emotionally barren (and it is still true that the poorest among us get the worst education).

Individually Guided Education was a radical reform in its time and it is even today if it is filtered through relatively progressive theories by teachers and principals. IGE anticipated today's buzzword "restructuring" by 25 years with its nongraded-team organization in elementary schools. Most radical of all was its school-based management scheme in which the team leaders, a parent representative, and the principal interpret policy, coordinate the work of the teams, and manage "the use of time, facilities, and resources that are not managed . . ." by the teams. [11] IGE is still used today, but I fear the implicit technological theories of teachers and principals (and others including parents) effects an intellectual conversion that too often makes it another mechanical reform.

The inability of schools to reform themselves in fundamental ways continues from the 1960s to this moment. I turn next to the apparent failure of the Coalition of Essential Schools to effect total-school reforms in any of the typical public schools studied.

I reluctantly draw the conclusion that the schools, once again, have rejected a fundamental reform. My reluctance is based on three considerations. The Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) offers schools an opportunity to embark on a path of fundamental reform whose principles accord with the Deweyan intellectual and democratic criterion of worth. Coalition-supported reforms are suffused with a generous spirit toward teachers and students. Finally, if a reform of this quality, backed by millions of dollars and good leadership, fails, it suggests to me that the public schools must surely be dying.

My conclusion of failure is based, in part, on the ethnographic studies of eight schools which were early members of the Coalition. The studies were made by Donna E. Muncey and Patrick J. McQuillan between 1986 and 1990. The ethnographers wanted to find out how teachers and principals interpreted the Coalition's nine principles and how they, along with students, developed and implemented the nine principles in their school. The researchers state that their "work is not a formal evaluation of the [Coalition]." [12] The conclusions I draw here are my own. Six of the eight schools were public high schools of which three were urban, two suburban, and one rural; one school was a private secondary school, and one was a public alternative school in a district that permitted parents to choose the public school they wanted their children to attend.[13] I summarize below how the CES reform fared in five typical public schools.[14]

Elliston High School: A highly-regarded suburban high school which was ranked first in the nation in one independent survey. Outcome: After three years of discussion, the faculty decided it liked the school as it was and withdrew from the Coalition.

Evans Hill High School: Located close to a large metropolitan area, Evans Hill is known to commuters as a desirable place to live. Evans Hill enjoys a good reputation with Ivy League universities. Outcome: Faculty resistance and a change in administration has "led those committed to Coalition ideas to feel isolated and embattled."[15] Neither the faculty nor the community has whole-heartedly embraced Coalition ideals.

Lewis High School: Lewis High School is a comprehensive city school that enrolls 1100 African-American students. Most classes enroll over thirty students yet Lewis has a "small school" feel. Lewis is an interesting case, the researchers say, because it was the only one among four schools with a school-within-a-school reform to expand its innovation over five years. Lewis has also made school more personal for students in many ways such as field trips to college campuses and a lower student teacher ratio than that which prevailed in the larger school. Outcome: The school-within-a-school reform has expanded, exhibitions as demonstrations of school achievement are used, and large time blocks allow teachers to adjust the schedule as required. [While Lewis's accomplishments are laudable, they were obtained under some conditions that do not obtain in

regular schools. The primary special condition was the drop in enrollment which enabled the principal to retain pro Coalition teachers -- a big break in any school reform effort. The principal is quoted as saying, "Some teachers probably won't buy Coalition philosophy. But I can help them relocate ... " [16] One wonders how this reform might have fared if the strong principal had had to work with teachers holding a less positive range of beliefs. Independent observers have raised questions about the validity of some of the claims made by the school on examinations and other matters.][17]

Russell High School: Employed a school-within-a-school design enrolling about 290 of its 950 students. Russell is a magnet school located in a city of 150,000 people. Fifteen although drop out and attendance rates have improved significantly. Faculty tensions and divisiveness prevail.

Silas Ridge High School: A comprehensive school that enrolls 1000 students. The school is organized on a five-tier tracking system in which students prepare for top colleges in one track while those who speak limited English are in another. A four-teacher team reform was instituted in 1985, but it lasted only a few years when personal and philosophical differences among team members emerged and other teachers perceived the team teachers to be receiving preferential treatment. Outcome: In 990 only fifty-two percent of the teachers voted to continue the Coalition membership in a faculty referendum.

What is the most important practical inference we might draw from these accounts of five Coalition schools that are reasonably representative of public high schools? The most important practical inference is that none of these schools was sufficiently alive to renew itself as a total, integrated "living" system. All these ailing schools could do was to wash and bandage one of their remote institutional fingers by instituting a partial school-within-a-school approach to reform. This limited reform effort was falsely interpreted by the enfeebled school organism's intellectual system as an infectious invasion so it forthwith ordered all teachers not involved in this presumed violation to attack, carp, and befuddle the forces for renewal. In this state of ecological reversal, white corpuscles attacked and neutralized the white corpuscles of renewal thus supporting the unhealthy and deteriorating state of the school's social and intellectual systems. The single fact that democratic progressives need be concerned about from my discussion thus far is the demonstrated inability of the public schools to reform themselves in sufficient numbers to make even 20 percent of them deliberate cultivators of intellectual and democratic values. The inability of the public schools to effect fundamental change is supported by my analysis of reform since 1960 as well as by the field studies of schools in the Coalition of Essential Schools. Both the longer historical perspective across three decades that I related earlier in this paper, and the more limited perspective gained from knowing the inability of the Coalition's reforms to reconstruct even one whole public high school, offer strong support for the assertion that the public school system is dying and that fundamental Deweyan-progressive reforms on a significant scale are impossible under present social and educational conditions.

Since there are approximately 500 schools in the Coalition and the Re:Learning effort in eleven states, it might be objected that surely twenty or thirty of these schools have effected total, whole-school reforms. A call to the Coalition headquarters at Brown University did not result in any claims for whole-school reforms.[18] I am pleased to state that the Coalition is honestly pursuing its vision of the good without the hucksterism and exaggerated claims that have marred reforms such as mastery learning, Chapter 1 remedial programs in reading, open classrooms, Madeline Hunter's method of teaching, Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI) in reading and mathematics and many more.

All of this looks like a dying process to me. And there is more. Fifty percent of Philadelphia's students don't graduate and city schools are more like holding centers for troops before a big engagement in an unannounced war; the innovations in District 4, New York City, do not spread beyond the Rocky mountains of the boundary that contains them; and in rural towns and suburbs sports, pump sneakers, friends, textbooks, and vacuous teacher talk define the students' minds, minds so abused by TV and a passive education that they appear sedated and the students are so indifferent they neither hate

nor love school; an education of oatmeal consistency has at last seeped through the permeable membranes of a living organism and clogged its nervous system with gruel!

Surely Dewey's first sentence in Democracy and Education comes back to us: "the most notable distinction between living and inanimate things is that the former maintain themselves by renewal." Renewal in biology is life. So it must also be in social life and with social institutions like schools. Dewey's biological analogy is a good one. Who knows when the air dies? Who knows when the ocean dies? Ecologists tell us that oceans are tough and resilient. But once they are battered too much "they could enter a degraded state from which it might take millions of years to recover." [19] It is painful to imagine the kingdom of life sustained by the physical system of a healthy ocean struggling to live in a degraded environment. Has not education lost the ocean's equivalent of biodiversity in its inability to renew itself in fundamental ways and in its rejection of reforms that illuminate intellectual and democratic values? Might not education, much weaker and younger than an ocean, be in decline awaiting its final death spiral? To the hurried hand and dull eye, a dead ocean looks very much like a living ocean and it is wet to the touch. We look at education and see buildings, thousands of people, almost frenetic activity, and conflict. "Surely this is life," we say. But might we not be looking at education with a dull eye and touching with a hurried hand?

What ought we to do given this blunt description and analysis of reform? If words are in plentiful supply on the world market as Lech Walesa said, what deeds should follow the high output of words? When life comes to action, I am neither a pessimist nor a utopian , but rather one who has a tragic sense. I do not believe in doing nothing as the deterministic pessimist suggests, nor do I substitute imagination for reality as the utopian does. One with a tragic sense recognizes both the opportunities for success and the prospects of failure in practical reform action. A tragic sense encourages us to "embrace two perspectives at once, without escaping into either one: to undermine our hope with doubt, and to fight against our skepticism with persistent effort for the better." [20]

My analysis of thirty years of school reform from a Deweyan-progressive perspective easily leads to despair. Fundamental reforms that cultivated intellectual and democratic values were ignored by most of our 80,000 public schools, or if fundamental reforms such as John Goodlad's and Robert Anderson's version of nongraded schools with its concept-structured curriculum were adopted, they were corrupted by the implicit anti-intellectual and undemocratic theories held by teachers and principals. The faddism and dishonesty that plagues the adoption of progressive reforms in most schools is beyond dispute. The experience of the nongraded school tells the story. Goodlad and Anderson wrote in 1963 that they had "witnessed with mixed awe and pleasure a remarkable surge of national interest in nongrading." Hundreds of cities, secondary schools and even colleges reported that they had adopted a nongraded organization. The United States Office of Education and the National Education Association wrote that nongraded reform was widely adopted. The developers of the nongraded school did express some concern about the "superficiality and inadequacy" of much that was being done under the label of nongrading. Six years later the fraudulent intellectual conversion of nongraded schools by practitioners was clear to Goodlad. "I should have known better," he wrote, ... "that teachers and administrators would reach eagerly for the catchy, innovative label and that nongrading soon would be used to describe pitifully old practices of interclass achievement grouping." [21] "Fraudulent conversion" or indifference has been the fate of the good 1960's reforms and it is the most likely fate of The Paideia Proposal and that of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Given all of this, we must still undergird our doubt with hope to achieve the proper tragic balance.

Virtually all reform since 1960 is of one kind: small scale, incremental reform. I think of these limited and partial reforms as Tom Thumb reforms. Tom Thumb reforms, like the legendary dwarf, are often bright, but they never exceed 40 inches in educational height. And they do not multiply. Isolated school-within-a-school reforms are Tom Thumb reforms (they remind me of the 1960s and the valiant if losing effects of the Coalition of Essential Schools today). A limited reform attacks a piece of the complex system in hopes that the reform will multiply. This is the implicit faith behind today's cautious experiments with team teaching, cooperative learning, and school-based decision making and most others; experience suggests

that these reforms win not spread 99.5 times in a 100 to include other elements in the school such as learning and teaching, curriculum, class schedules, in-school teacher education, student assessment and so forth. Tom Thumb reforms assume that the small will grow tall. Professional experience, history, and research say it isn't so. Recall the nongraded school reform as a place holder for many other corruptions of the good. Although these limited reforms will never fundamentally reform public education as a national institution under present social conditions, I believe we should continue their practice until better social times arrive. Not only does the pursuit of Tom Thumb reforms give many of us something to do and to write about, it keeps hope and the good alive; it gives us experience in learning where the public school can be improved in small ways and it is a moral gain if even 1000 students, thirty teachers, and three professors grow in charity and wisdom. My favorite "Thumb" reform is dialogue among the teachers and principal in one school. By linking the rich practical knowledge of practitioners to the conceptual knowledge gained from reading some serious books on history and educational theory, and discussing issues that arise from this practical-conceptual tension within a democratic process, we can <u>create</u> participatory knowledge that will enable teachers and principals to "hear" and "understand" ideas and reforms that transcend the mechanical and technological reforms that are most often proolfered by universities and federally-funded research agencies. I have engaged approximately 500 teachers and principals in these dialogues since 1984; I once believed they could reform high schools and American education. I still believe they do some good in the world, but my tragic sense permits me to say that they, too, are only Tom Thumb reforms. [22]

Make no mistake. There is not a beat for fundamental intellectual and democratic reform in the hearts of most administrators or teachers. I see no spark for reform among the citizens in our school communities. Reform does not burn brightly on the campuses of our major universities and schools of education. The game there is not reform but grants, institutional prestige, and the hustle of careerism. Ideas, conversation, and real books lose out in both realms to fads, technique, and immediate results. Things are, in short, corrupt. There must be a deep fissure of contempt in our society and profession when the qualities of mind itself are rejected by those who should be its stewards.

Fundamental reform will only come to a majority of our public schools when social conditions demand it. Legislatures might then "wipe the slate clean" as they did in Chicago, Illinois, and perhaps Kentucky. The legislatures might demand, as representatives of the people, that the public schools reform themselves in ways in which the very structure of time, facilities, the number of students teachers meet in a day and so forth are such that the organizational elements in a school lean <u>toward</u> fundamental reform rather than <u>against</u> reform as school organization and teaching lore do today. If we ever have the social equivalent to the technological Sputnik in 1957 to wake us from our democratic sleep, fundamental and universal reform might come. If the Soviet Union went through a long period of decay followed by the rapid dissolution of the communist system in 1989 and its democratic experiment soon after, there might be some social hope for the public schools. John Lukacs writes, speaking of the reluctance of many intellectuals to revise their opinions of Marxism long after its failures were obvious, that the "unwillingness of so many people to change their minds has been typical of this century . . ." and not only in politics. [23] Until more people outside the profession change their minds about the kind of public schools they want, I fear we must play at the margins of reform and true change. We must content ourselves for now with the seemingly small things the tragic sense dictates.

The seemingly small thing, being open to an idea or questioning something we have long assumed, or ordinary conversation, may offer us a narrow ledge on which to keep the idea of reform alive while we are stranded on the rock face that is today's hostility to fundamental reform. Let us take advantage of the relative quiet and stability a no-reform condition brings, and pay attention to those "little things" in ordinary experience that have the power to shape us. Tolstoy tells the story of a painter who corrected a student's work. "Why, you only touched it a tiny bit," the student exclaimed," but it is quite a different thing." The teacher replied: "Art begins where the tiny bit begins." Tolstoy then draws his moral in honor of the prosaic experience in life. "One may say that true life begins where the tiny bit begins where what seem to us minute and infinitely small alterations take place. True life is not lived where great external changes take place -where people move about, clash, fight, and slay one another -- it is lived only

where these tiny, tiny, infinitesimally small changes occur." [24]

Let us, then, pay attention to those "tiny alterations" in our individual and social selves from which great good or great evil may come. Evil comes quietly in the night with no grand design; it seeps into ourselves and our institutions with stealth, in our neglect of the little things of ordinary experience. The good, as Tolstoy and Dewey believed, requires constant attention to the mundane particulars of our ordinary experience because it is through these particulars that we make and remake ourselves. If we cannot will or think our way to a culture that supports intellectual and democratic reforms, a culture that is outraged at the intellectual and moral neglect that infuses the present system, some of us can keep the small fires of vision and hope alive on the ledges of our classrooms and schools as we take our ordinary experience for what it truly is — the material from which to create a better self and a better school. In this way, although it be the time of great drought, our trees will remain green and in time will bear much fruit when the fresh spring of social change at last arrives.

NOTES

1. John Dewey, Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Free Press, 1966. First published in 1916.)
2. The Philadelphia Inquirer, 16 November 1989, pp. IA, IOA
3. By a Deweyan -progressive perspective I want to suggest a perspective that reflects John Dewey's philosophy and to suggest also that this philosophy influenced some of the qualities in the broad and variegated "progressive movement" in education and politics. I intend to disassociate Dewey from the romantic child-centered wing of progressive education which is inconsistent with the permeating intellectual component in his educational philosophy, from the social reconstructionist wing of progressive education advocated by writers such as Theodore Brameld and George S. Counts, and I want to disassociate Dewey from the administrative progressives of whom David Tyack writes and from the "social policy experts" Walter Lippman endorsed which reflects a lack of faith in the ability of citizens to govern themselves.
4. Richard A. Gibboney, The Stone Trumpet: A Story of Practical School Reform m. 1960- 1990 (Albany, New York State University of New York Press, forthcoming.)
5. Ellis B. Page, "How We All Failed at Performance Contracting," Phi Delta Kappan LIV (October 1972): 117.
6. Reforms that fall into a gray area at a general level of analysis are community control of schools, New York City; career education; sensitivity training; leadership in education; mainstreaming special education students; coaching; and the flurry of reform reports in education in the 1980s. Two of these reforms remain ambiguous after further analysis: community control of schools in New York City because I could find no data on the impact of this reform on teachers and children, and mainstreaming which is itself a democratic idea, but the intellectual quality of the move depends on the quality of the particular class a student enters. The flavor of the other five reforms is mechanistic; coaching in itself, for example, cannot discriminate between "coaching" a teacher in Assertive Discipline or the Great Books. It is a pure technique without educational direction within itself. The anti-intellectual quality of graduate programs in educational administration is well known although they often include the phrase "educational leadership;" see Raymond E. Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962) and my own critique of a reform proposal, Leaders for America's Schools (Tempe, Arizona: The University Council for Educational Administration, 1988), titled "Education of Administrators: 'An American Tragedy,'" Education Week 6, Commentary Section, (April 15,1987): 28.
7. Dewey, Democracy and Education, pp. 223-225.
8. John Goodlad, School Curriculum Reform in the United States (New York. The Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1964), pp. 60, 69-70; Diane Ravitch, The Troubled Crusade: American Education 1945-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 265; and Daniel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner, Curriculum Development: Theory Into Practice, 2nd ed., (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 548-549. I review among others curriculums produced by the University of Illinois Committee on School Mathematics; The School Mathematics Study Group

(SMSG); and the Physical Sciences Study Committee (PSSC), whose physics course was almost synonymous with the "new science" courses of the 1960s. And there are exceptions to my conclusions. The Interdisciplinary Approaches to Chemistry (IAC) course developed by the University of Maryland was truly radical and (wouldn't you know?) unsung. IAC included flexible modules with a social dimension such as "Earth and its Neighbors" and "The Delicate Balance" which treated chemistry within the context of Nature and humankind.

9. Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, Task Force on Teaching as a Profession; A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century (New York: The Carnegie Corporation, 1986).
10. Gibboney, The Stone Trumpet. Chapter 4. I knew from experience that Chapter 1 remedial programs were drill-for-skill exercises. But I did not know how bad they were until I began to read the descriptive and research literature. My anger rose. What we do to these innocent children who most need our help is cruel. I say in the book that Chapter 1 programs constitute educational malpractice of a high order. And remember that Chapter 1 programs are one of the "big" 1960 reforms. One wonders how a profession as well fed as ours could not have mustered the energy to speak out against these programs years ago.
11. Thomas A. Romberg, ed., Toward Effective Schooling: The IGE Experience (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Copyright Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 1985), p. 24.
12. Donna E. Muncey and Patrick J. McQuillan, "Sustaining School Change: Case Studies from the Coalition of Essential Schools," Unpublished manuscript (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, October 1992), p. 4.
13. Donna E Muncey and Patrick J. McQuillan, "Teachers Talk about Coalition Reforms at their Schools," Working Paper #7, Unpublished manuscript (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, October 1992), p.4.
14. I have excluded three schools from my analysis because they are not, in my judgment, reasonably typical of urban, suburban, or rural schools in the U.S. One school was a private preparatory school and two were public schools. I excluded the school called Green Valley in the report as atypical because it is lead by a nationally known principal who began his reforms in 1981, long before the school joined the Coalition in 1985. This rural school is very small, enrolling 350 students grades seven through twelve (a boon to everyone there, but unfortunately not typical of most rural consolidated schools today). Wade School was excluded as atypical because it was built one grade at a time beginning with the seventh grade in 1985 when it joined the Coalition. Wade is also blessedly small enrolling 450 students in grades seven through twelve, but its smallness is not typical of most urban and suburban schools. Wade is located in a large city within a district that is widely known for its innovative practices, a condition that is not typical of urban schools.
15. Muncey and McQuillan, "Teacher Talk," p.6.
16. Muncey and McQuillan, "Sustaining School Change," p.12.
17. Muncey and McQuillan, "Sustaining School Change," pp. 9, 10.
18. Telephone conversation with Lisa Lasky, Manager of Communications, Coalition of Essential Schools, by the author, April 1993. Calls to several of the schools suggested by Lasky did not result in any claims for whole-school reforms. I did not call one school, Thayer High School, Winchester, New Hampshire, because it is atypical of rural schools. The charismatic leadership of its principal, among other considerations, make it atypical of rural high schools. Two schools do appear to be well down the road to whole-school reform. Walbrook High School, Baltimore, Maryland, has 95 percent of its teachers involved in some aspect of the reform according to Marian Finney, Coordinator. Every graduating student has given an exhibition to show he has learned. Most students also keep portfolios of their work as part of Walbrook's assessment policy. Twenty of Walbrook's 80 teachers are on five teacher teams that meet 125 students everyday. Woodward High School, Cincinnati, Ohio, involves 900 of its 1400 students in its efforts to become a neighborhood school. Thirty of its 100 teachers are engaged in six teacher teams. "This was a whole-school project from Day One," reports Diana Porter, Woodward Coordinator. Commendable as these reform efforts are, most teachers in these schools remain outside the team teaching structure. If we link the experience of the Coalition to the inability of public education to mount fundamental reforms in even 20 percent of its schools since 1960, we see

the virtual impossibility of fundamental reform under today's social and educational conditions. Our experience since 1960 also suggests that Deweyan-progressive reforms themselves cannot overcome the sea of indifference to reform among most administrators, teachers, and school board members. The good side to all of this is that we are at last learning what some of the problems are when serious intellectual and democratic reforms are tried. The bad side to all of this is that we may be seeing the first wisp of evidence in the long decline of American public education as we have known it for almost 150 years.

19. Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne H. Ehrlich, Healing the Planet: Strategies for Resolving the Environmental Crisis (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1991) pp. 146-147.
20. Nicholas C. Burbules, "The Tragic Sense in Education," Teachers College Record 91 (Summer 1990): 472.
21. Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education (New York: Random House, 1970), pp. 167-168. See also William H. Schubert, Curriculum: Perspective, Paradigm, and Possibility (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986), p. 243.
22. I have seen some amazing intellectual and professional transformations among high school and elementary teachers from their experiences in these dialogues although the whole school most often is not reformed. About 80 percent of the 500 teachers who have participated in the dialogues since 1984 have enjoyed the intellectual stimulation and the social nature and sharing that inhere in open conversation. For a partial documentation of what the dialogues have done and have not done see Shelly K. Salaman, "An Evaluation of the Dialogue Approach to Staff Development in a Comprehensive High School" (doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1988); Gary B. Campbell, "Staff Development through Dialogue: A Case Study of Educational Problem Solving" (doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1989); and my article "Just Words: Talking Your Way Past Reform to Educational Renewal," Journal of Curriculum and Supervision 4 (Spring 1989): 230-245. (I was more optimistic about reform in 1989 when this article appeared than I am today.)
23. John Lukacs, The End of the Twentieth Century and the End of the Modern Age (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1993), pp. 7-8.
24. Gary Saul Morson, "Prosaics: An Approach to the Humanities," The American Scholar (Autumn 1988): 521.

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